



NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF
ADAM J. BELLO
MONROE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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**COUNTY EXECUTIVE ADAM BELLO ANNOUNCES \$1.2 MILLION
ARPA INVESTMENT FOR VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA'S NEW
"THE FARM" PROGRAM**

Hydroponic Farm to grow 4-8 tons of fresh produce yearly for food insecure families in Monroe County

ROCHESTER, NY — Monroe County Executive Adam Bello today announced a more than \$1.2 million allocation of American Rescue Plan Act funds to Volunteers of America (VOA) to support an innovative hydroponic farm program. The program, called "The Farm," includes two large freight containers outfitted with hydroponic growing systems and will help combat food insecurity by growing fresh produce for distribution to economically disadvantaged populations throughout Monroe County.

"No family or child in our community should go home hungry. This innovative hydroponic farm for Volunteers of America promotes access to healthier foods in underserved communities and ensures thousands of people will have access to fresh greens and vegetables," **said County Executive Bello**. "Thank you to VOA for this transformative program, my colleagues at the County Legislature for approving these funds and to Congressman Morelle and Senators Schumer and Gillibrand for their work to secure these funds."

"At Volunteers of America, we work to advance social and health equity by combating poverty and enhancing the well-being of those in need. Our wide array of programs address the complex challenges that under resourced populations face, and we are proud to be launching this new and innovative program that will address food insecurity and lack of access to nutritional food within our local community," **said Dr. Junior Dillion, President & CEO of Volunteers of America Upstate New York**. "The Farm is a program that will allow us to hydroponically grow and distribute healthy produce year-round to the people we serve and other vulnerable populations throughout Monroe County—while also providing jobs and training opportunities, as well as educational programming for kids. We are very grateful to the funding from Monroe County that made this project a reality."

"As a lifelong farmer, I could not be more thrilled to support expanding our local agriculture and farming. This funding boost will help Volunteers of America (VOA) launch 'The Farm' program and purchase a state-of-of-the-art hydroponic farm that can produce

up to 8 tons of produce annually - furthering our local agricultural development and its future," **said Legislator Robert Colby.** "The produce distributed from the VOA will help more than 2,500 food insecure individuals including veterans who will also benefit from the agri-therapy program offered through this program. Thank you to all those who help make this possible - I look forward to seeing all that will Grow in Monroe!"

The [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) describes hydroponics as the technique of using a water-based nutrient solution rather than soil to grow crops or herbs. VOA used the ARPA funds to purchase two state-of-the-art vertical hydroponic farming units that operate year-round and can produce nearly 2,000 units of produce every week, resulting in 4-8 tons of produce each year.

[In the 2021 Racial and Structural Equity Commission Report](#), affordability and lack of access to fresh produce was deemed a factor of health disparities with Black and People of Color (BIPOC) communities within the city and in Monroe County. The report also notes residents living with obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure frequently cite food access and cost as major challenges.

The VOA will distribute fresh food to economically disadvantaged families whose children attend the VOA Children's Center, the VOA's Food Pantry and other pantries run by non-profit organizations that serve vulnerable and impoverished individuals and families throughout Monroe County.

In total, VOA plans to provide fresh produce to more than 2,500 people (including children) every year.

Produce grown at The Farm includes:

- Lettuce
- Collards
- Microgreens
- Swiss Chard
- Radishes and turnips
- Basil

In addition to providing healthy food, The Farm will provide agri-therapy opportunities for veterans struggling with PTSD, offer vocational training for individuals who have experienced homelessness to develop job skills and provide educational opportunities for children in local school.

This project was selected as part of Bring Monroe Back, Monroe County's recovery plan that allocates federal funds received through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to transformative community projects and initiatives. Through the efforts of Congressman Joseph D. Morelle, and Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, Monroe County is the recipient of \$144,080,127 in local fiscal recovery funds.

“Gardening fosters a sense of community and self-reliance, offering a therapeutic and fulfilling way to improve physical and mental well-being,” **said Congressman Joe Morelle.** “The Volunteers of America Farm program will not only provide thousands of food insecure individuals with nutritious options, but also job training and agri-therapy for our veterans. I’m grateful County Executive Bello and I were able to secure funding for this program and look forward to seeing the fruits of their labor.”

“No family should have to worry about where their next meal will come from,” **said US Senator Charles Schumer.** “That’s why this program is so important to ensure disadvantaged families across Monroe County have access to fresh, healthy food. I commend County Executive Bello and the Volunteers of America for fighting food insecurity and for using the funds I secured for local governments in the American Rescue Plan Act to serve the community’s most vulnerable children, veterans, and homeless.”

“Every child and family should have access to fresh, affordable produce,” **said U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand.** “VOA’s farm program will continue to reduce food insecurity and provide much-needed resources to our most vulnerable residents. I am proud to have helped secure federal funding to support this innovative program that will provide access to fresh produce to thousands of residents in Monroe County that experience food insecurity, and I will continue to fight to ensure that all New York families have meals on their tables. I commend County Executive Bello and the Monroe County Legislature for investing in the community and for their advocacy in addressing food deserts in Monroe County.”

To learn more, visit www.VOAUPNY.org.

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